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TAGS: PGOV EFIN PL

SUBJECT: PSL LEADERS SEE FUTURE CLOSELY TIED TO CIVIC PLATFORM

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR DAN SAINZ FOR REASONS
1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: The Polish People's Party (PSL) has largely linked its short-term future to the success of its senior coalition partner, Civic Platform (PO). According to PSL's Parliamentary Caucus Chair Stanislaw Zelichowski and PSL Deputy Party Chairman Jan Bury (also a Deputy Treasury Minister), a cooperative atmosphere prevails between the two parties within the Government and parliament. According to Zelichowski, PSL will likely support the presumed PO candidate in 2010 presidential elections, PM Donald Tusk, rather than field its own candidate. Both officials were optimistic that the coalition government will run its full four-year term, but did not rule out the possibility that parliamentary elections might be held six months early (Spring 2011) to avoid disrupting Poland's EU Presidency in the second half of the year. Both predicted an easy re-election for party chair (and Deputy PM) Waldemar Pawlak at the party's congress on November 8. The perks of power help explain PSL satisfaction with its more pro-business coalition partner, as does the electoral math -- if early elections were held, the PSL might not meet the 5 percent threshold for parliamentary representation. END SUMMARY.

COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COALITION PARTNERS

¶12. (C) In recent discussions with the Embassy, key leaders of the Polish People's Party (PSL) expressed satisfaction with the party's relationship with its senior coalition partner, Civic Platform. According to PSL Deputy Party Chairman (and Deputy Treasury Minister) Jan Bury, a cooperative atmosphere prevails within the Government, especially in the Council of Ministers. Bury, who occasionally attends in Treasury Minister Grad's stead, said PM Tusk chairs productive and "effective" meetings. Tusk rarely calls for a show of hands, Bury said, but instead strives to build consensus between the two parties. Tusk instructs ministers to identify commonalities first and then works to hammer out compromises on key issues. When it is not possible to reach a consensus, Bury said, Tusk refers legislation back to the Council's permanent committee or to the responsible ministries.

DIFFERENCES PERSIST ON ECONOMIC ISSUES

¶13. (C) Stanislaw Zelichowski, who chairs PSL's caucus in the Sejm, described a similarly cooperative relationship between the two parties in the Sejm, saying that there are only about ten or so issues on which the two parties had not yet been able to reach agreement. This is not surprising, Zelichowski said, given PO's "free market orientation" and PSL's long-standing support for social welfare programs. Zelichowski said PSL does not share PO's optimism that the Polish population will be ready for euro accession by 2011, but does not plan to voice such skepticism publicly. While PSL might disagree on the timing, Bury said, they accept that Poland will join the euro zone at some point in the future.

PSL FUNCTIONS AS INTERMEDIARY WITH OPPOSITION

¶4. (C) Zelichowski said PSL functions as the intermediary between the coalition and the opposition Law and Justice (PiS) party: "PiS does not talk to PO and PO does not talk to PiS. When PiS wants to talk, they come to us." PSL has also played a key role in outreach to SLD because of the "strong relationship" between the two parties. Bury said he was mystified by recent meetings between PiS Chairman (and former PM) Jaroslaw Kaczynski and SLD Chairman Grzegorz Napieralski. Zelichowski said that the move was confusing for SLD voters, whose political positions strongly diverge from those of PiS, and resulted in a significant drop in public support for the party (recent polling places SLD's support at around 6 percent). Both Zelichowski and Bury stated that SLD's leadership now realizes the move was a mistake, one which they have attempted to correct by coming out in support of PO's media reform law. (COMMENT: On the basis of recent public comments by Deputy Sejm Speaker Jaroslaw Kalinowski, it is not entirely clear that PSL fully supports PO's draft media reform law and, to a certain extent, contradicts Bury and Zelichowski's insistence that PO strives for consensus, rather than simply forcing through key pieces of legislation. END COMMENT.)

PSL PLANS TO BACK TUSK FOR PRESIDENT

¶5. (C) Zelichowski said PSL does not currently plan to run its own candidate in the 2010 Polish presidential elections, but instead intends to support the likely PO candidate, PM Donald Tusk. Zelichowski discounted recent media speculation -- fueled primarily by statements from PiS politicians --

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that PO might call for early elections in 2010. He predicted the coalition will last through the current term, but did not preclude the possibility that parliamentary elections might occur six months early (perhaps March 2011) to give the incoming government sufficient time to prepare for Poland's EU Presidency in the second half of the year. Zelichowski speculated that PO and PSL might even form an electoral coalition for the 2011 parliamentary elections. (COMMENT: Zelichowski's views on prospects for future cooperation with PO may in large part stem from practical considerations. In recent weeks, PSL has consistently polled just below the parliamentary threshold of 5 percent. END COMMENT.)

PSL WILL SUPPORT PO'S "LEGISLATIVE MARATHON"

¶6. (C) Zelichowski told us PO's plan to accelerate the parliamentary agenda by pushing through 140 pieces of legislation in October was, to a large extent, "media fireworks," but said PSL deputies plan to support the initiative. Asked about a potential PiS boycott and the prospect that President Lech Kaczynski would veto a large number of the bills, Zelichowski said PiS has more to lose than gain by vetoing the legislation "If they do," he said, "it will be clear which parties are serious and which are not." (COMMENT: PiS contacts have similarly dismissed the "legislative marathon," noting that approximately 80 of the bills simply amend existing Polish legislation to conform to recent EU directives and legislation. END COMMENT.)

PAWLAK WILL BE RE-ELECTED AT PARTY CONGRESS

¶7. (C) Turning to anticipated outcomes of PSL's November 9 party congress, both Bury and Zelichowski predicted that party chair (and Deputy PM) Waldemar Pawlak would not be seriously threatened. In contrast to media predictions that Minister of Agriculture Marek Sawicki would have a strong chance of winning if he decided to challenge Pawlak, Bury said PSL members by and large feel it does not make sense to change course, both in terms of leadership and the party platform. (COMMENT: In a separate conversation, Kalinowski told EconCouns that Sawicki is a technocrat, not a politician, implying if not directly stating that Sawicki is

no threat to Pawlak. END COMMENT.) While the party is technically obligated to put someone up against Pawlak, Bury insisted it has been difficult to find someone interested in being a candidate. Bury said he, Sawicki, Zelichowski, and Kalinowski had all declined. In the end, Zelichowski said, someone will run, but Pawlak will not be seriously threatened.

COMMENT

18. (C) PSL officials have gone out of their way in public statements to express satisfaction with their role in the coalition and to emphasize the party's merits as a strong coalition partner. In part, this is making a virtue out of necessity, since the PSL might not muster the votes to pass the 5 percent threshold for representation in parliament if the coalition fell apart, forcing early elections. PSL officials also enjoy the perks of power and the ability to reward key supporters with government positions. So the left-leaning PSL publicly downplays its opposition to PO plans for accelerated privatization and greater farmer payments for social security and health insurance. For its part, the PO has criticized but done little to correct widely reported nepotism within PSL-led government offices.

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